DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 808 JC 780 466

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TITLE To Succeed or Not to Succeed: Is That the Only Question in Learned Helplessness? A Critical Analysis of Theoretical and Methodological Issues.
INSTITUTION Genesee Community Coll., Batavia, N.Y.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 38p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attribution Theory; Behavior Change; *Elementary Secondary Education; Goal Orientation; Instrumentation; *Learning Disabilities; *Learning Motivation; Personality Assessment; Post Secondary Education; *Research Methodology; Research Problems; Research Reviews (Publications); Self Concept; Sex Stereotypes; Student Motivation; Task Performance
IDENTIFIERS Learned Helplessness

ABSTRACT

Instrumentation, task content, the limited options of success or failure, methodology and assumptions are substantive issues which question the validity of conclusions made about human subjects in studies of achievement motivation and learned helplessness. A review of learned helplessness studies outlines the number and source of subjects, kinds and content of tasks used, methodological considerations and significant findings in each study. It is concluded that different results are obtained when variables are behavioral rather than projective, and when subjects are told that their responses were expected rather than unexpected, consistent with sex role or inconsistent with it. Different outcomes are also obtained when environmental norms or expectations are changed. These issues have serious implications for the schools particularly as the structure of the classroom in American schools lends itself to the development and perpetuation of learned helplessness and low achievement behaviors by females. Suggestions to change learned helplessness behavior include: training students to deal with failure constructively, incorporating information about correct responses and reasons for failure in negative evaluations and, retraining females in their attributional processes. A bibliography is included. (MB)

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TO SUCCEED OR NOT TO SUCCEED: IS THAT THE ONLY QUESTION IN LEARNED HELPLESSNESS? A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

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JC 780 466

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Introduction	1
Review of Research on Learned Helplessness, Achievement Motivation and Attribution	4
Instrumentation	11
Task Content	12
Success or Failure/Limited Options	13
Methodology	13
Assumptions	14
Summary of Methodological Issues	15
Implications for Schools	28
References	33

TO SUCCEED OR NOT TO SUCCEED: IS THAT THE ONLY QUESTION IN LEARNED HELPLESSNESS? A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Introduction

With regard to the state of personality research, Mischel (1977) argues that if human behavior is determined "by many interacting variables - both in the person and in the environment - then a focus on any one of them is likely to lead to limited predictions and generalizations." He further argues that personality researchers need to consider other factors for fruitful research. He suggests five: (1) the role of context, (2) the multiple goals of personality measurement, wherein the choice of constructions and of measures depends on the construer's purpose, (3) using the "subject" as a potential expert and colleague, (4) an analysis of environments, and (5) the role of person variables.

Mischel cites a cautionary note by Jenkins (1974) regarding what is actually remembered by a subject in an experimental situation:

> "What is remembered in a given situation depends on the physical and psychological context in which the event was experienced, the knowledge and skills that the subject brings to the context, the situation in which we ask for evidence for remembering, and the relation of what the subject remembers to what the Experimenter demands" (Mischel, 1977, p. 246).

What is remembered applies to action as well as to memory and

touches upon the methodologies and dependent measures employed by many researchers of achievement motivation and learned helplessness.

Similar criticisms are echoed by Maehr (1976) concerning the achievement motivation research, i.e. the lack of attention paid by researchers to the influence of contextual conditions on achievement. He criticizes McClelland's work for stressing learned inner drives and culturally-derived personality patterns and for neglecting the situational contexts that affect achievement. Instead, Maehr suggests a framework for a cross-cultural study of motivation that stresses the importance of contextual conditions in eliciting achievement motivation and at the same time emphasizes cultural relativity in the definition of the concept. He disregards inner states such as needs, drives, etc., and stresses instead behavioral patterns of motivation or routines. Examples of such routines are (1) a change in direction, choice, (2) persistence, and (3) variation in performance when capacity is in some sense controlled. Maehr acknowledges the importance of the normative dimension in achievemen- behaviors. Norms exist for approval or disapproval of certain achievement behaviors, and these must be considered whenever expectancies are used as dependent measures.

The significance of contextual variables can also be found in research on locus of control and attributional processes. Maehr extends his argument for the importance of the contextual factors by citing the work of Crandall (1969) and what she calls the 'illusion' of control as a factor in achievement motivation. DeCharms (1968) shows that contextual conditions that communicate to persons that they are

"origins" rather than "pawns" will increase their achievement motivation. Maehr's own research indicates that freedom from external controls in learning may encourage a continuing interest and a greater willingness to engage in challenging ideas.

Finally, Maehr suggests a naturalistic study of achievement motivation that would include the socio-cultural context in which it is found. In addition, he suggests that other factors affecting such motivation be investigated: norms for achieving behaviors, psychological processes, patterns of approval/disapproval, etc.

Many of Mischel's criticisms of personality research and Maehr's criticisms of achievement motivation research can be applied to the construct of learned helplessness. Researchers have tended to focus upon learned helplessness as a behavioral trait independent of contextual conditions. Learned helplessness has been studied exclusively in achievement settings using achievement tasks. By definition and by connotation, learned helplessness is also perceived as maladaptive behavior that would require some kind of intervention strategy or retraining program. It has not yet been studied as an adaptive response to situational demands.

For the most part, researchers have neglected the contextual situations that give rise to learned helplessness as well as the potential adaptive or purposeful aspects of this behavior. If all human behavior is purposeful, then research has failed to focus on those elements of learned helplessness that would explain its occurrence and utility. Much of what is lacking in achievement motivation research applies equally to the literature of learned

helplessness, a construct which originated with a study of the escape-avoidance behavior of laboratory dogs.

Review of Research on Learned Helplessness, Achievement Motivation and Attribution

Learned helplessness as a psychological construct appeared in the literature when Seligman, Maier and Geer (1968) discovered that dogs exposed to unavoidable inescapable shock in a pretreatment situation later failed to learn a new response when the shock was made both avoidable and escapable. The experimental animals had "learned to be helpless" in that they behaved as though there was independence between what they did and what happened to them. Initially, the experimental animals had been shocked and not allowed any avenue of escape. Thus, they learned to tolerate the shock until it was turned off by the experimenter and they ultimately stopped all attempts to escape. When these experimental animals were then placed in a new situation in which escape from shock was possible, they behaved as if escape was not possible and remained in their cages. On the other hand, the control group of animals who had not been pre-exposed to the unavoidable shock condition did try to escape from the avoidable shock condition and were successful. The control group of animals had learned that effort at escape made success possible, whereas the experimental animals had learned something different. When they had tried to escape from an inescapable situation they had failed; when placed in a new escapable situation they transferred their passive behaviors and could not escape. It was only after much time and repeated trials that experimenters succeeded in getting these experimental

animals to make escape attempts and to succeed.

Similar behavior has been identified in human subjects who give up before they begin a task and have adopted an attitude of expected failure or who lack perseverence necessary to complete academic tasks (Dweck and Reppucci, 1973; Dweck, 1975a, 1975b; Dweck and Bush, 1976). Differences have been found in the kinds of attributions made by children who persevered in tasks and by those who gave up. The perseverers believed that their success was due to their efforts and they therefore tended to "try harder" until they succeeded. Those who gave up held quite different beliefs about the reasons for their failure. They believed they had little or no ability for the task and therefore, regardless of how much effort they expended, they expected that the outcome would always be the same - failure (Dweck and Reppucci, 1973).

Learned helpless behavior created obstacles to learning in academic settings and thus received increased attention by researchers. Causal factors were investigated and intervention strategies devised in attempts to change the self-defeating course of "in-action" such students exhibited (Dweck, 1975a). Sex differences in learned helpless behaviors were found in that boys generally attributed their successes more to their ability and their failures to lack of effort, whereas girls tended to attribute their successes to effort, luck and ease of task, and their failures to a lack of ability (Dweck and Reppucci, 1973; Nicholls, 1975). Sex and age of the agent of negative or failure feedback also appeared to be factors in the kinds of causal attributions that subjects made to "explain" their

behaviors. Girls were most impaired by negative feedback from adult female evaluators, whereas boys were most impaired by negative feedback from male peer evaluators (Dweck and Bush, 1976).

Such findings suggest that males and females are not responding in the same way to similar environments nor are teachers behaving toward males and females in identical ways. A generalized pattern of negative feedback for males has been reported by Dweck and Goetz (1977) which differs from the specified pattern for females. Adults tend to give negative feedback to males for a variety of reasons - their classroom behavior, their dress, their lack of effort - as well as for intellectual failure. Females, however, receive negative feedback for rather specific reasons usually to do with the intellectual quality of their work since females are usually well-behaved, in proper dress, and assumed to be working at full potential. Thus males come to disregard their negative feedback since it is so diffuse, while females come to regard highly their negative feedback since it is so specific. The implications for the schools are that while males will persist in spite of negative feedback from an adult and in spite of past failures, females will tend to give up at the first indication of negative feedback from adults. Such differences in persistence will ultimately bear upon the rate of academic success in high school, college and the professions. While females command an advantage in reading and verbal skills in elementary school, they lose when social demands come into conflict with academic achievement in junior and senior high schools. Mathematical aptitudes also differ but for reasons closer to the learned helplessness model. Unlike

verbal skills, math skills involve new units of information and of conceptualization in order to progress into more specific and differentiated areas such as calculus, trigonometry, etc. At each new level, a tremendous degree of persistence is necessary to master the material, persistence that is far more likely to be expended by males than by females given the kind of socialization and expectations that each sex in our culture is exposed to. Boys are encouraged and expected to be proficient at math, girls are not.

Further research needs to be directed at the most interesting cases - those that are the exception rather than the rule. What are the characteristics of females who achieve in both verbal and mathematical areas? What are the characteristics of males who give up in the face of initial failure? How can the negative consequences for females of having adult female evaluators be overcome? Does this suggest that to maximize female achievement, male teachers are going to have to provide the feedback? Why would a male teacher be more effective for females students and a female teacher more effective for male students? Does this suggest that opposite-sex evaluators are in some way having an effect on other aspects of behavior than academic ones? If so, how does this operate? Do male teachers give female students acceptance for superior intellectual work and at the same time reward them for their femininity thus eliminating the conflict females are taught to feel?

Such questions have serious implications for the schools if both females and males are to be educated to their fullest potential. They suggest that new approaches and new assumptions need to be made

not only in the way we teach children, but in the goals, expectations, and assumptions with which we teach them.

Learned helplessness as a psychological construct is related to the literature of achievement motivation and attribution theory. Most directly, the phenomenon has been studied in achievement-oriented, academic settings with tasks that are achievement-based. Ten-item anagrams have been used by Feather and Simon (1971) and by Levine, Reis, Sue and Turner (1976). Individually administered WISC-type block designs that were both solvable and insolvable were used by Dweck and Reppucci (1973). A series of digit-letter substitution problems was used by Dweck and Bush (1976). Arithmetic problems were used by Dweck (1975a) while angle-matching problems were used by Nicholls (1975). Puzzles comprised the task for Ames, Ames and Felker (1977) while Stake (1976) used the Wechsler digit-symbol task.

One direction of research in achievement motivation has been to investigate the impact of prior expectations on subsequent behaviors. Subjects with higher expectancies in an experimental audio-visual studies program were most successful while subjects with low expectancies were the least successful in research by Simonson and Bullard (1976). Although earlier research used only male subjects, recent studies have shown some sex differences in expectations for success in achievement settings (Crandall, 1969 ; Dweck and Reppucci, 1973; Nicholls, 1975). Boys generally have higher expectations for success and attribute it more often to their ability than do girls who tend to have lower expectations for success and attribute their successes more often to effort than ability. Additionally, subjects tend to achieve more

when the task is perceived to be sex-appropriate than when it is sex-inappropriate (Etaugh and Brown, 1975; Stake, 1976; Feather and Simon, 1975).

A partial explanation for sex differences in expectancies may be the differential responses to failure that are given by males and females. Males tend to overlook failure feedback and behave as if it were an irrelevant aspect of the environment - they ignore it and persist in spite of it. Females tend to concentrate on failure feedback and behave as if it were a highly valid indicator of their abilities - they allow it to overwhelm them and stop their responses. Sex-appropriateness would explain differences in achievement in the mathematical areas, mechanical and engineering areas and in the sciences - all areas where females are usually actively discouraged from entering. It would also explain the low rate of male entry into nursing, secretarial and teaching areas, to say nothing of the lower status, power and pay such fields typically offer. Complex patterns of reinforcements have tended to separate males and females in achievement areas. Such reinforcement begins in the home with parents and the models they present and continues in the schools, in churches, in the media so that the norms for achievement are powerfully communicated to the male and female child. While not impossible to overcome, such norms can create conflicts in individuals who seek to be different and can at the very least discourage and delay entry into desired achievement areas.

Researchers have been interested in knowing the reasons that subjects gave as causal factors for their success or failure in

achievement-related situations with competitive tasks. Originally, attribution theory focussed on either ability or effort explanations (Feather and Simon, 1971). Attribution theory has most typically been concerned with learned helplessness in that it offers a way of understanding the reasons a subject offers for the degree of persistence expended, and the reasons a subject believes are responsible for the outcome.

For example, attributions were characterized as stable (ability or task difficulty) or unstable (effort or luck), as expected (sex-appropriate) or unexpected (sex-inappropriate) by Etaugh and Brown (1975). These researchers found that a hypothetical male's success in a mechanics class was attributed to his ability by experimental subjects, whereas his failure in a mechanics class was attributed to a lack of effort (expected and unexpected attributions, respectively). When the hypothetical person was a female, the situation was reversed. Her success in mechanics (an unexpected outcome) was attributed to her effort, her failure (an expected outcome) was attributed to her obvious lack of ability.

The implications of such findings for both schools and the employment area suggest that individuals carry expectations for success and for failure that are related to the sex-appropriateness of the task or behavior. Such expectations may conflict with reality - a female may in fact make an excellent airline pilot, astronaut, surgeon or judge - but it will take the powerful exception to change most attitudes. Even then, it is likely that such sex-inappropriate success will be attributed to the "uniqueness" of the individual, rather than to the belief that anything is possible if one has the ability and tries hard enough to succeed.

Instrumentation

As elements of achievement motivation and attribution theory become entwined in the methodology and explanation of learned helplessness problems arise. Projective techniques have typically been employed to measure the need for achievement, whereas learned helplessness studies have used behavioral observation techniques. The two approaches are not measuring the same factors nor in the same way. Projective techniques tap expectancies and hypothetical situations involving someone other than the subject; these measures are highly sensitive to social norms and to social stereotypes. On the other hand behavioral assessment is more sensitive to the specific situational and experimental demands on the subject's behavior at a specific time. It is easier to suggest a cause-effect relationship with behavioral assessment when one has the stimulus and response as evidence. With projective techniques, only correlations and other associations are possible, with no possibility of verification when inconsistencies between expectations and behaviors are found.

If both methods of data collection were incorporated into the same study, important information on validation of the construct of learned helplessness and achievement-related strivings could be obtained. For the most part, however, such a merging of methodologies has not occurred. It is therefore likely that the instrumentation used in achievement motivation and learned helplessness studies are not measuring the same things at all. Achievement motivation measures tap inner needs, feelings, drives, states while learned helplessness measures tap outer behaviors such as degree of persistence and speed

at a task.

Task Content

The content of the tasks used in learned helplessness studies has been achievement-oriented with an emphasis on verbal and quantitative problem-solving abilities. One dependent measure has been the number of correct responses in a given time period; another has been the degree of persistence and/or number of correct responses after a failure experience (Dweck and Reppucci, 1973; Dweck, 1975a; Dweck and Bush, 1976).

Contrasted with this are the tasks common to both achievement motivation and attribution studies. Hypothetical people in hypothetical settings are presented to subjects as either succeeding or failing at a task, occupation or course of study. Subjects are asked to predict what will happen to the imaginary characters, whether they will in fact succeed or fail, why they will do either, and how happy they will be afterwards. Subjects fill out rating scales, Semantic Differential scales, questionnaires with open-ended statements that are then analyzed by content analysis, as in the T.A.T. responses (Etaugh and Brown, 1975; Feather and Simon, 1975, 1971; Feather, 1975; Frieze and Weiner, 1971; Horner, 1968, 1970).

The effects of failure in competitive achievement situations have generally been more negative than failure in non-competitive ones. Because many teaching strategies stress winning, coming in first, being at the top, beating others, competition with peers is inadvertantly triggered. This results in attributions for success

(due to ability or effort) or self-defensive strategies to cope with failure (lack of ability, lack of luck, teacher error) (Nicholls, 1975). Levine, Reis, Sue and Turner (1976) in a mixed sex competitive task found defensive biases in males who failed, but none in females who failed - unlike the fear of success literature might predict. Losing a competitive game to a female seemed more negative for a male than losing a competitive game to a male was for females.

Success or Failure/Limited Options

Success and failure are presented to subjects as a forced choice with little shades of gray in between. Extremes of behavior are presented in sex-role inappropriate situations and subjects are asked to predict the future actions and feelings of characters thus exposed. While it may be true that expectations precede and influence subsequent behavior, it is also possible that those expectations are accurate mirrors of social norms. Subjects who respond with anxiety, fear and concern about a person who is successful in an unexpected, sex-inappropriate situation may, in fact, be verbalizing legitimate, realistic anxieties of what the real world reaction would be, in addition to or instead of their own underlying anxieties (as in Horner, 1968).

Methodology

Information on same-sex norms was involved in the level of goal-setting responses made by male and female subjects in a study on occupational goal-setting by Stake (1976). When informed of

higher performance among same-sexed others, both males and females set higher occupational goals.

> "For females, positive information regarding female occupational performance is very scarce. Females are seldom exposed, either directly or through the media, to women who are achieving in higher occupational positions. Yet they are frequently exposed to women in lower occupational positions. In contrast, males are regularly exposed to men achievers. They hear about men's accomplishments through the media and they are likely to be in direct contact with men who are occupational achievers. While it may present other kinds of problems for males, they have information that men can and do achieve" (Stake, 1976).

Stake concludes that the normative information about male achievement potential available to men through the culture leads to higher occupational goal setting by males. On the other hand, the normative information about female achievement potential that is available to women through the culture leads to lower occupational goal setting by females. The effects of the norms within a culture on the behavior of subjects in an experimental occupational goal setting situation apply as well to achievement motivation studies and learned helplessness studies. They apply, that is, but they are rarely dealt with as powerful sources of influence on behavior.

Assumptions

Finally, when the terms used to describe behaviors are scrutinized, it is often possible to detect subtle and not so subtle value judgments and assumptions of maladaptiveness on the part of investigators. "Learned helplessness" is not a term one would use

to describe a person being recommended or praised, nor is the term "underachiever." It has been assumed that learned helplessness and underachievement are behaviors that need to be changed because they are detrimental to the individual and thus are maladaptive. This assumption may not be entirely valid in all situations since it has not been investigated. One can just as well assume that if a person exhibits learned helplessness or underachievement that it is for reasons that bring a degree of relief and is therefore adaptive. The relief may be from competitive strivings, from family pressures, from need for peer acceptance and approval, from the need for social acceptance by the opposite sex, etc. Maladaptiveness may be a construct in the eye of the investigator only!

Summary of Methodological Issues

Instrumentation, task content, the limited options of success or failure, methodology and assumptions are substantive issues which question the validity of conclusions made about human subjects in studies on achievement motivation and learned helplessness. This is particularly true when research fails to attend to contextual constraints and demands. While the findings may be valid for the studies at issue, their generalizability is doubtful. The following section contains a summary of studies reviewed in this paper with notations regarding the number and source of subjects, kinds of tasks used, some methodological considerations and some of the significant findings in each study.

The studies cited in the following section have been organized around several variables. Each table below compares all studies along two dimensions. The variables of sex of subject and age of subject are summarized for each study in Table I. The majority of studies cited have included elementary-aged subjects of both sexes.

TABLE I

SEX OF SUBJECT	AGE OF SUBJECTS		
	Elementary School	High School	College +
Male	Ames, Ames & Felker, 1977		
Female		Feather & Simon, 1975	Smith, 1976
Female & Male	Dweck & Reppucci, 1973 Dweck, 1975a Dweck, 1975b Dweck & Bush, 1976 (I, II) Etaugh & Brown, 1975 Nicholls, 1975	Etaugh & Brown, 1975	Etaugh & Brown, 1975 Feather, 1975 Levine, et al. 1976 Stake, 1976

The dimensions of task content (achievement or non-achievement) and type of methodology (projective or behavioral observation) are summarized for all studies in Table II. All but one study involve achievement-type tasks, with half of the studies using projective methods and half using behavioral assessment methods.

TABLE II

TASK CONTENT	METHODOLOGY	
	PROJECTIVE	BEHAVIORAL
ACHIEVEMENT	Dweck & Bush, 1976(I) Etaugh & Brown, 1975 Feather, 1975 Feather & Simon, 1975 Frieze & Weiner, 1971 Levine et al., 1976	Ames, Ames & Felker, 1977 Dweck & Reppucci, 1973 Dweck, 1975a Dweck & Bush, 1976 (I) Feather & Simon, 1971 Levine et al., 1976 Nicholls, 1975 Stake, 1976
NON-ACHIEVEMENT		Dweck, 1975b

Table III summarizes the dimensions of type of task (competitive or non-competitive) and assumptions about learned helplessnessness (adaptive or maladaptive). The table clearly shows that all studies cited view learned helplessness as maladaptive, with the majority of studies utilizing non-competitive tasks.

TABLE III

TYPE OF TASK	ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LEARNED HELPLESSNESS	
	Maladaptive	Adaptive
COMPETITIVE	Ames, Ames & Felker, 1977 Levine, et al., 1976 Nicholls, 1975 Stake, 1976	
NON-COMPETITIVE	Dweck & Reppucci, 1973 Dweck, 1975a, 1975b Dweck & Bush, 1976 (I, II) Etaugh & Brown, 1975 Feather & Simon, 1971 Feather, 1975 Feather & Simon, 1975 Frieze & Weiner, 1971	

All of the studies cited in this review are summarized in the following section, listed alphabetically by the authors' last names. Each summary describes the sample used (where information was available), the tasks involved and the results found. Several review articles are also included with relevant issues for learned helplessness research.

Ames, Ames and Felker, 1977

Sample: 40 boys in six 5th grade classes in two Indiana county schools

Task: Solvable and insolvable puzzles, achievement related, competitive, behavioral

Results: Failure in competitive conditions caused strong negative affect and self-punitive rather than ego-defensive evaluations. Competition contributed to increased self-derogatory behavior. Children who failed in competitive conditions rated themselves less capable and less deserving of reward and experienced greater negative affect than did boys failing in non-competitive setting.

Dweck and Reppucci, 1973

Sample: 40 5th graders (20 girls and 20 boys) from four different lower middle class suburbs of New Haven

Task: Individually administered WISC block designs, both solvable and insolvable, achievement related, non-competitive, behavioral

Results: Persistent Ss took greater personal responsibility for intellectual academic performance regardless of whether they succeeded or failed. Differences were found in the tendency to attribute failure to lack of effort between males and females and between helpless and persistent Ss.

Dweck, 1975a

Sample: 12 Ss (5 girls and 7 boys) from two public schools

Task: I.A.R. scale, test anxiety scales, effort vs. ability scale, arithmetic problems (N = 75 - 120), behavioral, academic, rating scales, intervention program

Results: Children who were taught to attribute failure during training to insufficient effort were able to persist after failure in

the test situation. Shows positive effects of "Attribution Retraining Intervention Program" (learning to attribute failure to inadequate amount of effort, not to lack of ability).

Dweck, 1975b

Sample: Five classrooms at 4th and 5th grades

Task: Observation of the kinds of teacher-student interactions of an evaluative nature, behavioral observation

Results: Teachers explicitly attributed intellectual failures to lack of motivation six times as often for boys as for girls. Boys got one-third negative evaluations related to intellectual quality of work, while girls got two-thirds negative evaluations for quality of work. Same pattern seen in each room.

Dweck and Bush, 1976 (I)

Sample: 108 5th graders (52 girls and 56 boys) from two local schools

Task: A series of digit-letter substitution problems, behavioral, attributional

Results: When failure feedback was delivered by a peer, girls showed an immediate and sustained improvement in performance. Girls improved with male evaluators. Results for boys was exactly the opposite - boys showed an immediate and sustained improvement in performance when failure feedback administered by adult female. Decrements for boys from peer deliverer.

Dweck and Bush, 1976 (II)

Sample: 108 4th and 5th graders (53 girls and 55 boys)

Task: Questionnaire with hypothetical situation, rating scale, projective, hypothetical

Results: Greater tendency for girls to attribute failure more to lack of ability and less to lack of effort with adult female agents as opposed to peer and male agents. Boys showed greater tendency to attribute failure more to lack of ability and less to lack of effort with peers vs. adults.

Etaugh and Brown, 1975

Sample: 80 Ss (40 females and 40 males) in grades 5, 8, 11 and college

Task: Projective T.A.T. type of rating task. Asked to give reasons for success or failure by a hypothetical person, projective, hypothetical

Results: Female's success in mechanics was attributed less to ability than was identical male performance. Effort chosen to explain female's success more often than to explain a male's success. Differential perceptions of male and female performances thus appears to be well established in both boys and girls by 5th grade. Shows effects of the situational demands, normative behaviors (mechanics and athletics were tasks)

Feather and Simon, 1971

Sample: 85 high school males, ages 15-17

Task: Ten-item anagram test, confidence ratings, causal attributions, achievement, behavioral

Results: Expected success was attributed more to ability and less to good luck than was the unexpected success. Expected failure

was attributed more to lack of ability and less to bad luck than was the unexpected failure. Findings of positivity biases in social perception were taken to indicate the need for careful analysis of the social context of performance in attribution studies.

Feather, 1975

Sample: 280 Ss (146 males and 134 females) of whom 260 were enrolled in college introductory psychology courses

Task: Questionnaires "Reactions to Success" and "Reactions to Failure" at an occupation involving both a male and a female. Projective, hypothetical, use of ratings.

Results: Involves social stereotypes and occupations. Males and females were more likely to be judged as happier (or unhappier) about success (or failure) solely on the basis of their sex and the degree to which the occupation was seen as likely to be filled by males or females. The procedure emphasized male and female competition and made sex-role stereotypes about men and women salient. Success was evaluated more positively if it was consistent with societal conceptions about the sex role than if it was inconsistent. Failure was evaluated more negatively if it was inconsistent with societal conceptions about the sex role than if it was consistent.

Feather and Simon, 1975

Sample: 48 females in a private Church of England girls' school of high socioeconomic status

Task: Semantic differential and other ratings used to assess Ss' perceptions of different causal factors in the success or failure of male or female at different occupations. Projective, hypothetical.

Feather and Simon, 1975

Results: Impressions and beliefs are measured. Deals with impression formation and causal attributions. Authors refer to instrumentation as "Objective" rating scales. Found significant main effects of occupation, outcome (success or failure), sex x outcome interaction effects. Males were evaluated more positively, seen as more powerful, viewed as more obedient and polite (rule following) and perceived as less feminine if they succeeded than if they failed. Females, however, were evaluated more positively, seen as more powerful, viewed as more obedient and polite, and perceived as more feminine if they failed than if they succeeded(!)

Frieze and Weiner, 1971

Sample: (I) 34, (II) 32

Task: (I) Ss provided with information about an achievement related activity and asked to make judgments.
(II) Ss required to attribute outcome to ability, effort, luck, task difficulty.
Projective, achievement-related context, use of ratings.

Results: Used judgments and perceptions. Data revealed the achievement cues were systematically utilized both as main effects and in configural patterns. Found that success is more likely to be attributed to internal factors (ability, effort) than is failure.

Levine, Reis, Sue and Turner, 1976

Sample: 128 undergraduate Ss at California State University (64 females and 64 males) to fulfill requirement for introductory psychology.

Task: Ten-anagrams, attributions, rate opponent, behavioral, competitive, achievement, projective

Results: Significant sex of subject x won/lost interaction.

Males more likely to make skill attributions for successes than for failures regardless of sex of partner. Females did not differ in attributes to success vs. failure when partner was male, but attributed success to luck more often than to skill. No significant differences in Ss' perceptions of opponents. Males showed a self-defensive bias (fear of failure). Females did not show a predicted self-derogatory bias, but rather employed a rational attribution pattern.

MacDonald, 1970

Sample: Review article

Task: Review article

Results: "Motivation coupled with positive expectancy equals optimism; motivation coupled with negative expectancy equals desperation." and "Locus of control is not a motivational variable, but rather an expectancy variable."

Nicholls, 1975

Sample: 96 white 4th graders (48 female and 48 male) from two public schools in middle class Ohio towns

Task: Angle-matching task along with attribution questionnaires, information about normative performance standards given, behavioral, achievement

Results: A main effect for sex on standards measured after the test showed boys had higher standards than girls. Boys felt better than girls under high value conditions, while girls felt better under low value condition. Girls showed a significant self-derogatory bias which was not evident for boys. Sex x practice outcome interaction was obtained. Boys more than girls attributed failure to bad luck and

had higher luck attributions after failure than after success. Thus boys showed a defensive bias in luck attributions while girls did not. Girls' ability attributions were self-derogatory. Boys had higher expectancies than girls after the practice, a result paralleling and reflecting boys and girls different biases in attributions after the practice. It is assumed that bad luck can change, therefore boys' defensive attributions of failure to bad luck should lead to higher expectancies. But girls' self-denigrating ability attributions would be a basis for lower expectancies.

Smith, 1976

Sample: 330 entering students in a small women's college

Task: Demographic and personality characteristics of those who persisted and those who withdrew from college were compared. Comparative, ad hoc.

Results: No differences on demographic characteristics but were some on personality ones between those who left and those who stayed. Withdrawers were more complex, autonomous, intellectually disposed. Persisters were more socially-inclined and outgoing, more practically oriented. Positive value of withdrawing was indicated. Showed the effects of the environmental demands on both groups, with different results in behavior.

Stake, 1976

Sample: 42 Ss (22 females and 20 males) in an introductory psychology class

Task: Modified form of Wechsler digit-symbol task. Goal-setting after being given sex-appropriate and sex-inappropriate norms for the task. Behavioral and achievement.

Stake, 1976

Results: Significant effects of normative information. For both males and females, higher goal-setting occurred under sex-appropriate condition and lower goal-setting under sex-inappropriate condition. Subjects of both sexes set goals which approximate the same-sexed performance norm provided them. Effects of normative information (and of environmental demands) on expectancies.

Valins and Nisbett, 1971

Sample: Review article

Task: Review article

Results: "Self-attributions of inadequacy are not merely damaging, but erroneous and these errors are not likely to be discovered because a given individual experiences such situations too seldom to perceive the situational nature of the stress and apparent inadequacy. Reassuring social comparison agents are often not available even if the individual were motivated to seek them out. And the explanations offered by the cultural milieu are as likely to reinforce as to counteract self-attributions of inadequacy. The individual who is inclined to label his stress-produced anxiety as "neurotic" (or learned helpless) readily finds support for that interpretation in the new naive psychology."

Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest and Rosenbaum, 1971

Sample: Review article

Task: Review article

Results: "Knowledge of social norms must be considered in conjunction with personal performance to reach conclusions concerning outcome causality. If performance is consistent with the norms, that is, success when others succeed, and failure when others fail, the outcome is attributed to the external factor of task difficulty, and insufficient information is provided for self-evaluation. On the other hand, performance inconsistent with social norms, that is, success when others fail or failure when others succeed, is likely to give rise to internal attributions and self-evaluation judgments.

"It has been suggested that individuals tend to attribute their own behavior to environmental factors, while the behavior of others is ascribed to personal characteristics or traits. This suggests when making judgments concerning others, that effort may be perceived as a stable attribute, but an unstable attribute in self-ascriptions."

Implications for the Schools

The review of research on learned helplessness and achievement motivation revealed different results when dependent variables were behavioral rather than projective (Levine et al., 1976 vs. Horner, 1968). Additionally, outcomes differed when subjects were told that their responses were expected rather than unexpected, consistent with sex roles or inconsistent with it. Different results were also obtained when environmental norms or expectations changed, showing that expectancies hinge on the situation and environmental press of the experimental situation. Thus the poorer behavior or lower ratings are more a function of situational demands and expectancies than they are a function of general personality traits (i.e. learned helplessness can be specific to a particular situation). The review also touched upon the adaptive value of seeing results as dependent on the situation or as within the control of the individual which is a crucial issue for therapy (Valins and Nisbett, 1971).

Issues raised by learned helplessness research have serious implications and consequences for the schools. The very structure of the classroom in American schools lends itself to the development and perpetuation of learned helplessness and low achievement behaviors by girls. The powerful effects of sex differences in each of the elementary school students cannot be denied. However, competition seems to be more diastrous in a mixed-sex situation when boys are beaten by girls and use a self-defensive bias to explain their own failure (Levine, et al., 1976). The chronic attributional

process of self-denigration which females use to explain their behavior in achievement and competitive situations is also intolerable.

Following are specific issues that need to be addressed by the schools if changes in behaviors of students exhibiting learned helplessness are to change. Additionally, the issue of adaptive value of such behavior is suggested with implications for the schools.

Dweck (1975a) points out that rather than experiencing only success in tasks, it is better to train children to deal with failure situations in a more constructive fashion.

> "An instructional program for children who have difficulty dealing with failure would do well not to skirt the issue by trying to ensure success or by glossing over failure. Instead, it should include procedures for dealing with this problem directly. This is not to suggest that failure should be included in great amounts or that failure per se is desirable, but rather, that errors should be capitalized upon as vehicles for teaching the child how to handle failure."
>
> (Dweck, 1975a, p. 485)

With regard to the detrimental effects for females of negative evaluation in the classroom, Dweck (1975b) again points out that "in order to maximize the probability of a positive change in performance, negative evaluation in the classroom should:

> "1. provide explicit information about the quality or correctness of the response with little ambiguity as to the referent of the feedback;
>
> 2. provide, implicitly or explicitly, an explanation of the failure, indicating how the failure can be overcome, for example by suggesting strategies that are appropriate for reaching the correct solution."
>
> (Dweck, 1975b, p. 6)

Adult female evaluators have a more detrimental effect upon girls' achievement, while they enhance males' achievement. Such a disparity in outcome is discussed by Dweck and Bush (1976):

> "The data indicate that feedback from the male adult agent led to less helplessness among girls than did feedback from the female adult."
> (Dweck and Bush, 1976, p. 154)

When females attribute their failure to a lack of ability, they tend to discourage continued testing of the environment. However, when boys attribute their failure to problems with the evaluative agent, and since that agent changes from year to year in schools, boys' behavior may encourage continued testing of the environment with a new teacher. Such processes point to the need for retraining of girls in their attributional processes so as to capitalize on what really goes on in the school setting (Dweck and Bush, 1976).

Important implications of goal-setting in occupational choices is discussed by Stake (1976) who found that females tended to set lower goals than males. She discussed the impact of the media and the culture on role-models that were sex-appropriate for each sex and which explained the disparity in goal-levels. In order to change this and to raise the level of expectations for occupational attainment for females, Stake suggests the implication is crucial for teachers, counselors and others who affect girls' vocational choices:

> "In helping girls to set higher goals, positive information regarding female occupational achievements should be made available. The timing of this exposure may also be important. Since children set sex-typed occupational goals as early as kindergarten ... early exposure to positive information may be the most effective in raising female occupational goals."
> (Stake, 1976, p. 27)

Attributions of outcomes to luck can have adaptive values according to Nicholls (1975). As previously stated, if it is assumed that bad luck can change, boys' defensive attribution of failure to bad luck should lead to higher expectancies. Girls' self-denigrating ability attributions would be a basis for lower expectations.

> "Boys spent more time when failing than succeeding, while girls did not differ significantly across success and failure. This might reflect the tendency, evident after the practice, for boys to attribute failure to luck which, since luck is unstable, allows the possibility that a failing trend might reverse. Girls, being inclined to attribute failure to poor ability, but disinclined to attribute success to good ability, would have less reason than boys to think that effort could reverse a failing trend or to think that a succeeding trend could be maintained easily."
>
> (Nicholls, 1975)

Nicholls goes on to say that since most achievement situations involve outcomes that reflect effort, by applying greater effort when failing than when succeeding, boys might succeed and thereby confirm their belief that failure was due to bad luck. By applying similar effort regardless of success or failure, girls would not allow success to clearly indicate good ability and girls would thus maintain their self-derogatory ability attributions.

The implication here is that not only do students who become learned helpless need to be trained to exert more effort, they also need to be trained to change the kind of attributions that affect the degree of effort expended.

With regard to the effects of competition on achievement behaviors, Ames, Ames and Felker (1977) suggest that those settings which accentuate social comparison undermine the critical relationship

between effort attributions and positive or negative affect and future achievement-motivated behaviors. They note evidence to suggest that females fare worse than males in competitive situations. Females may be more self-critical in attributing failure outcomes than males, and females may take less personal credit for their successful outcomes. "Sex differences in self and other attributions may have important implications for the structuring of achievement tasks" (Ames, Ames and Felker, 1977, p. 8).

Not only do researchers in the field of learned helplessness and achievement motivation need to attend to the social context and the environmental demands upon students, but the schools must also begin to attend to the processes inherent in them that perpetuate destructive and self-defeating student behaviors. The issues discussed in this paper are of a theoretical and methodological slant. Specific attention to individual subject matter tasks and classroom procedures needs to be accomplished if the suggestions for change are to be made possible. The research points the way in a general sense, but the specific ways in which teachers and administrators can implement the suggestions are yet to come. Perhaps that will be the focus of future research in applied settings.

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